

# Before They Became Actors—How Some Broadway Stars Started to Earn a Living.

**Frank Tinney, for Instance, Was an Undertaker—Ed Wynn, a Druggist's Clerk—Barney Bernard Sold Suits and Cloaks, Raymond Hitchcock, Shoes.**

By Bide Dudley.

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**I**N selecting people to follow the acting profession Fate doesn't hesitate to delve into the nooks and corners of all walks of life. She is no respecter of race, creed or previous condition of servitude. Undoubtedly, in your time, you have heard the expression, "A good brick-layer was spoiled when he went on the stage." Used facetiously to register an adverse opinion of somebody's acting, the saying may literally be true.

The art of putting one brick evenly on another may have lost a promising follower when he deserted the trowel for the theatrical boards. All of which means nothing much except that it may point out that the trades and professions of ordinary mortals are just as apt as not to furnish stars to uplift the drama, or grind it in the dust, just as you may think. A man doesn't have to be born to the stage to be an actor. Some of them are of theatrical stock, but there are many who aren't, and yet they are good actors.

What a fellow has been in his earlier days needn't unfit him for informing his lord the carriage waits very gracefully, or from starving in a theatrical boarding house, during the slow summer months, just as successfully as the son of a noted star might. The butcher's son, while delivering the pork chops, may find himself possessed of the divine spark that urges him to take up the sock and buskin and join the Lambs. And, if he heeds, there is no reason why some day he should not meet Wilton Lackaye or get a nod from J. J. Shubert. If these things come about he will realize fully the wisdom of the move that cut him loose from the meat business, for he will be pointed out as an actor, and the boys who hang out in front of the New York Theatre will wave to him and touch him.

In looking over the list of men rated as actors we find many who started up the wrong street when they were younger. Raymond Hitchcock—he of the comedy vein and pants—was once a shoe clerk and in Auburn, too. Even while fitting the feet of the Auburn populace he began to dream of a stage career and very frequently, in his absent-mindedness, he twitched a corn which should have received more consideration. Raymond was not a very good shoe clerk and one day the boss called him into the private office. Fate was working.

"Hitchcock," said the boss, "I don't believe you know much about selling shoes."

"What difference does it make so long as I eat?" responded Raymond with a sincere desire for knowledge.

"It makes a great deal of difference to me," said the boss. "Let me put a question to you. If a woman with a No. 4 foot comes in here for a pair of shoes what do you show her?"

"A pair of No. 4's."

"And do you tell her they are No. 4's?"

"Of course!"

The boss sighed. "The cashier will give you your week's pay," he said.

"This business is not for you," he said.

Raymond walked out and went on the stage as a chorus man. Later he learned he should have said: "I tell her the shoes are No. 2's."

But it was too late. Raymond had been shunted out of the shoe business right onto the stage. The rest you know.

Raymond Hitchcock not only can act, but he can produce, if needs be, and go through bankruptcy as well as any theatrical plunger that ever lived. Had he remained in the shoe business he might still be in Auburn, whereas he has travelled all over the United States and Canada and lived at the best hotels everywhere. Success has not spoiled him. Even though his clothes look like a checker-board he is still as sincere as when he used to tickle the feet of the fair sex in the town named for red-headed girls. But enough of Raymond! Let us move on to Frank Tinney.

When Frank Tinney was a lad in Philadelphia the undertaking business caught his eye. There was something fascinating about the coffin and shroud, and he made up his mind to work himself into a position whereby the family might have ice on the butter and flowers on the table almost every day. He obtained a job as night clerk in the gathering place of the dead departed without much trouble. At 12 o'clock each night Frank would lock the front door and go to sleep in a coffin with the telephone nearby. One single and Frank was awake and he got the reputation of being the most alert undertaker's assistant in Philadelphia. One day, however, he quit his job. The undertaker was dumfounded.

"But the heavy dying season is just coming on, Frank," he protested. "I can't afford to lose you."

"Same I'm quitting."

Grant Mitchell, playing in "Kempy," comes from Ohio. In his early days he perceived that his State was a hotbed of Presidential timber and he decided to start right, anyway. So he became a lawyer. Just about that

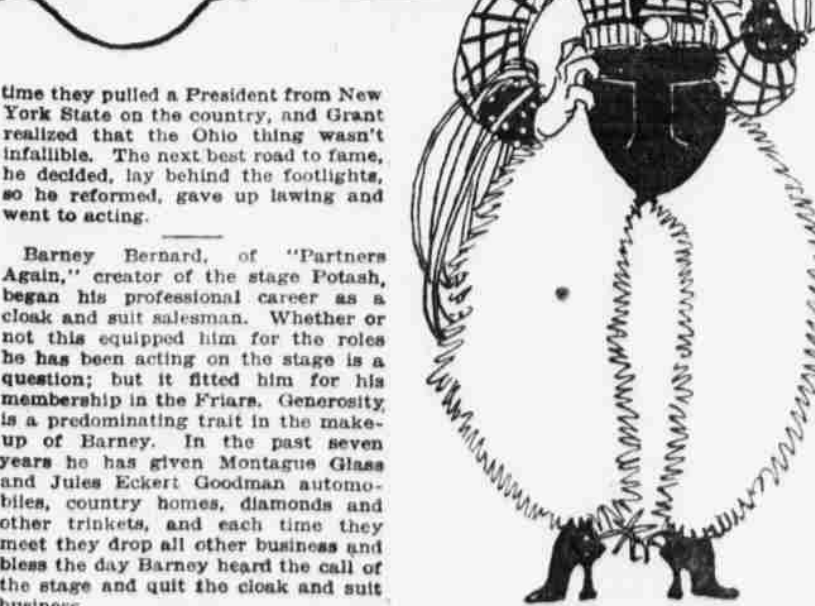
FRANK TINNEY WAS AN UNDERTAKER



Bob J. 22



WILL ROGERS WAS A COWBOY



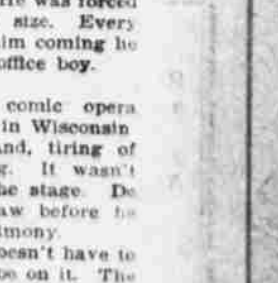
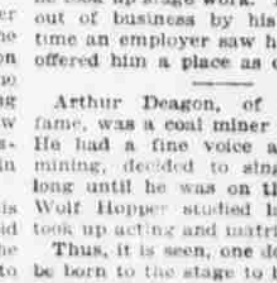
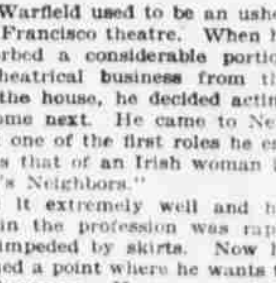
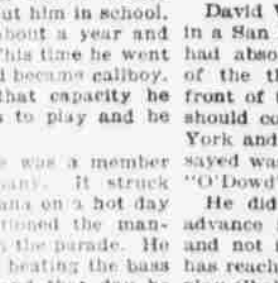
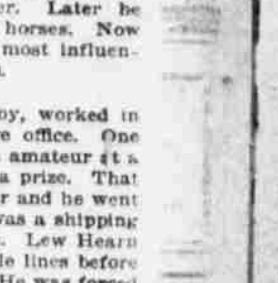
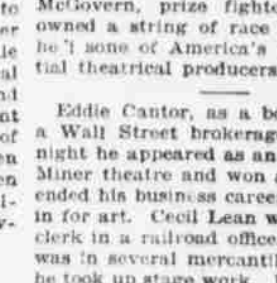
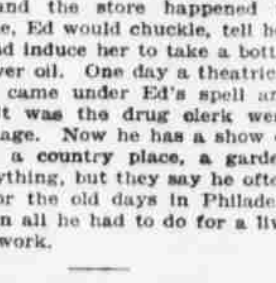
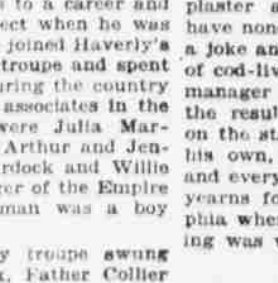
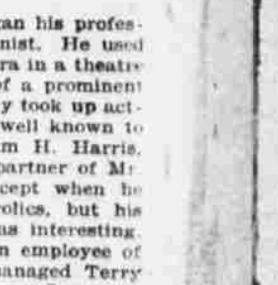
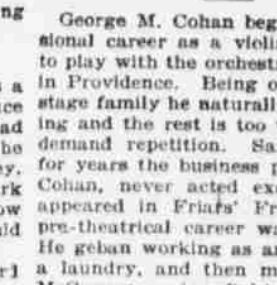
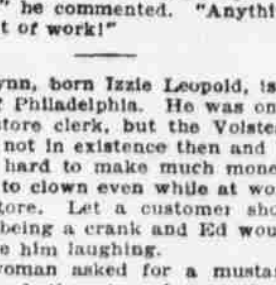
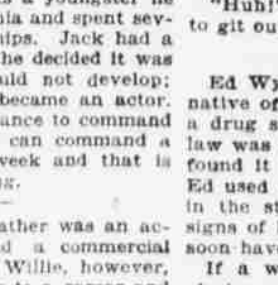
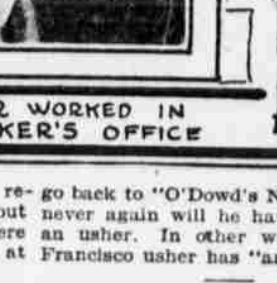
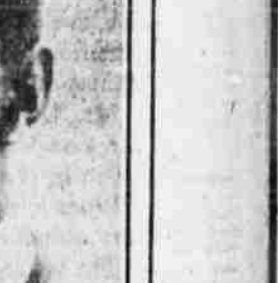
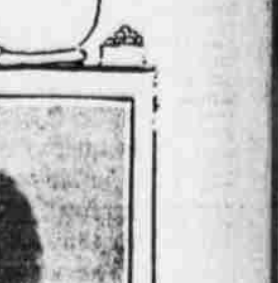
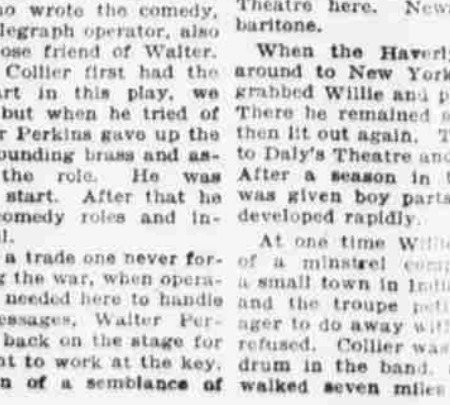
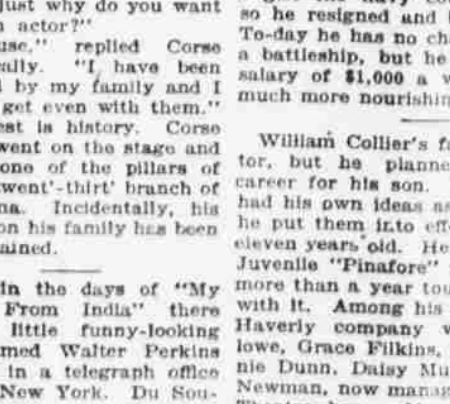
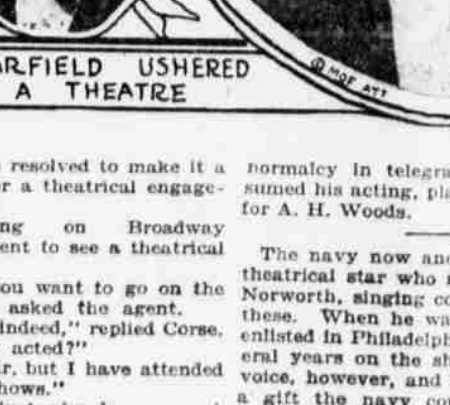
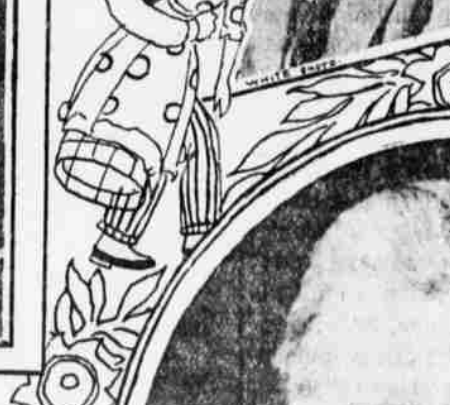
time they pulled a President from New York State on the country, and Grant realized that the Ohio thing wasn't infallible. The next best road to fame, he decided, lay behind the footlights, so he reformed, gave up law and went to acting.

Barney Bernard, of "Partners Again," creator of the stage Potash, began his professional career as a clerk and suit salesman. Whether or not this equipped him for the roles on stage is a question; but it fitted him for his membership in the Friars. Generosity is a predominant trait in the make-up of Barney. In the past seven years he has given Montague Glass and Jules Eckert Goodman automobiles, country homes, diamonds and other trinkets, and each time they meet they drop all other business and bless the day Barney heard the call of the stage and quit the cloak and suit business.

Corse Payton comes from Indiana, where he attacked life as a clerk in a general store. Out of his \$10 a week he saved up about \$200 with the idea in view of visiting New York some day and seeing the Aquarium. As he worked and saved he developed a yearning to be an actor and wear white spats. He had observed a num-

ber of the members of the theatrical profession who came to play at the Town Hall, and he gained from them the impression that life behind the footlights was akin to peaches and cream with every meal. His family criticized him severely for harboring such an ambition, but Corse refused to be moved. Thus it was that when the time came for his visit to New

WILLIAM COLLIER BEAT THE DRUM IN A MINSTREL BAND



York he resolved to make it a quest for a theatrical engagement.

Arriving on Broadway Corse went to see a theatrical agent.

"So you want to go on the stage?" asked the agent.

"I do, indeed," replied Corse.

"Ever acted?"

"No, sir, but I have attended many shows."

"Well, just why do you want to be an actor?"

"Because," replied Corse dramatically. "I have been criticised by my family and I want to get even with them."

The rest is history. Corse Payton went on the stage and became one of the pillars of the ten-twenty-third branch of the drama. Incidentally, his revenge on his family has been fully obtained.

Back in the days of "My Friend From India" there was a little funny-looking man named Walter Perkins working in a telephone office here in New York. Du Souchet, who wrote the comedy, was a telephone operator, also and a close friend of Walter.

William Collier first had the chief part in this play, we believe, but when he tried of it Walter Perkins gave up the art of pounding brass and assumed the role. He was a hit from the start. After that he played many comedy roles and invariably did well.

Telegraphy is a trade one never forgets, and during the war, when operators were badly needed here to handle Government messages, Walter Perkins turned his back on the stage for a while and went to work at the key.

With the return of a semblance of normalcy in telegraph circles he resumed his acting, playing several roles for A. H. Woods.

The navy now and then supplies a theatrical star who makes good. Jack Norworth, singing comedian, is one of these. When he was a youngster he enlisted in Philadelphia and spent several years on the ships. Jack had a voice, however, and he decided it was a gift the navy could not develop; so he resigned and became an actor.

To-day he has no chance to command a battleship, but he can command a salary of \$1,000 a week and that is much more nourishing.

William Collier's father was an actor, but he planned a commercial career for his son. Willie, however, had his own ideas as to a career and he put them into effect when he was eleven years old. He joined Haverly's Juvenile "Pinafore" troupe and spent more than a year touring the country with it.

Among his associates in the Haverly company were Julia Marlowe, Grace Fickins, Arthur and Jennie Dunn, Daisy Murdock and Willie Newman, now manager of the Empire Theatre here. Newman was a boy baritone.

When the Haverly troupe swung around New York, father Collier grabbed Willie and put him in school. There he remained about a year and then it out again. This time he went to Daly's Theatre and became a callboy.

After a season in that capacity he was given boy parts to play and he developed rapidly.

At one time Willie was a member of a minstrel company. It struck a small town in Indiana on a hot day and the troupe performed the manager to do away with the parade. He refused. Collier was beating the bass drum in the band, and that day he walked seven miles in the sun and it, but it is safe to say he will never

dust, carrying the big drum. On returning to the hotel he was just about wilted. Standing by the door were two farmers. One of them looked at the bass drummer with contempt.

"Hu!," he commented. "Anything to git out of work!"

Ed Wynn, born Isidore Leopold, is a native of Philadelphia. He was once a drug store clerk, but the Volstead law was not in existence then and he found it hard to make much money. Ed used to clown even while at work in the store. Let a customer show signs of being a crank and Ed would soon have him laughing.

If a woman asked for a mustard plaster and the store happened to have none, Ed would chuckle, tell her a joke and induce her to take a bottle of cod-liver oil. One day a theatrical manager came under Ed's spell and the result was the drug clerk went on the stage. Now he has a show of his own, a country place, a garden and everything, but they say he often yearns for the old days in Philadelphia when all he had to do for a living was work.

David Warfield used to be an usher in a San Francisco theatre. When he had absorbed a considerable portion of the theatrical business from the front of the house, he decided acting should come next. He came to New York and one of the first roles he essayed was that of an Irish woman in "O'Dowd's Neighbors."

He did it extremely well and his advance in the profession was rapid and not impeded by skirts. Now he has reached a point where he wants to play Shakespeare. He may never do it, but it is safe to say he will never

go back to "O'Dowd's Neighbors" and turning to the hotel he was just about never again will he have to serve as an usher. In other words, the San Francisco usher has "arrived."

George M. Cohan began his professional career as a violinist. He used to play with the orchestra in a theatre in Providence. Being of a prominent stage family he naturally took up acting and the rest is too well known to demand repetition. Sam H. Harris, for years the business partner of Mr. Cohan, never acted except when he appeared in Friars' Frolics, but his pre-theatrical career was interesting. He began working as an employee of a laundry, and then managed Terry McKeever, prize fighter. Later he owned a string of race horses. Now he's one of America's most influential theatrical producers.

Eddie Cantor, as a boy, worked in a Wall Street brokerage office. One night he appeared as an amateur at a minor theatre and won a prize. That year he began his career and he went in for art. Cecil Lean was a shipping clerk in a railroad office. Lew Hearn was in several mercantile lines before he took up stage work. He was forced out of business by his size. Every time an employer saw him coming he offered him a place as office boy.

Arthur Deagan, of comic opera fame, was a coal miner in Wisconsin. He had a fine voice and, tiring of mining, decided to sing. It wasn't long until he was on the stage. De Wolf Hopper studied law before he took up acting and matrimony.

Thus, it is seen, one doesn't have to be born to the stage to be on it. The average actor's not born; he is made—usually by his press agent.